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AUTHOR Armbruster, Bonnie B.; Lehr, Fran; Osborn, Jean

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This booklet contains a short summary of what scientific research says about how children learn to read and write. It also discusses things you can do with your child at three different grade levels -- kindergarten, first grade, and second and third grades. These activities will help the child become a reader. In addition, this booklet contains a list of helpful terms and ideas for books to read and organizations to contact if you would like more help or information. (AMT)

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Kindergarten through Grade 3

Second Edition
Spring 2003

Proven ideas from research for **parents**

A Child Becomes a Reader

KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 3

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Proven ideas from research for parents

A Child Becomes a Reader

KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 3

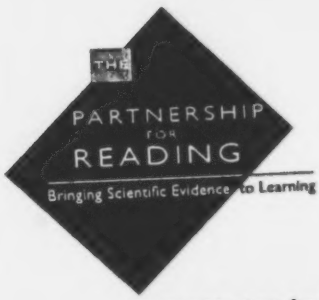
Produced by RMC Research Corporation, Portsmouth, New Hampshire

Authors

Bonnie B. Armbruster, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Fran Lehr, M.A., Lehr & Associates, Champaign, Illinois

Jean Osborn, M. Ed., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign



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The National Institute for Literacy

Sandra Baxter
Interim Executive Director

Lynn Reddy
Communications Director

Spring 2003

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The National Institute for Literacy, an independent federal organization, supports the development of high quality state, regional, and national literacy services so that all Americans can develop the literacy skills they need to succeed at work, at home, and in the community.

The Partnership for Reading, a project administered by the National Institute for Literacy, is a collaborative effort of the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to make evidence-based reading research available to educators, parents, policy makers, and others with an interest in helping all people learn to read well.

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Introduction

The road to becoming a reader begins the day a child is born and continues through the end of third grade. At that point, a child must read with ease and understanding to take advantage of the learning opportunities in fourth grade and beyond—in school and in life.

Learning to read and write starts at home, long before children go to school. Very early, children begin to learn about the sounds of spoken language when they hear their family members talking, laughing, and singing, and when they respond to all of the sounds that fill their world. They begin to understand written language when they hear adults read stories to them and see adults reading newspapers, magazines, and books for themselves.

Mothers, fathers, grandparents, and caregivers, this booklet is for you. Your role in setting your child on the road to becoming a successful reader and writer does not end when she* begins kindergarten.

This booklet contains:

- A short summary of what scientific research says about how children learn to read and write
- Things you can do with your child at three different grade levels—kindergarten, first grade, and second and third grades—to help him become a reader, as well as what to look for in quality reading instruction at each grade level
- A list of helpful terms. Throughout the booklet, these terms appear in **bold type**.
- Ideas for books to read and organizations to contact if you would like more help or information

* To make this booklet easier to read, we sometimes refer to a child as "he" or "she." However, all of the information about how children learn to read applies to both boys and girls.

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Try a few activities from this booklet with your child. You don't need special training or expensive materials. Just include the activities in the things you already do together every day. Make these activities part of the warm, loving relationship you are continuing to build with your child.

The building blocks of reading and writing

The building blocks of reading and writing

From several decades of research, we have learned a lot about how children learn to read and write. This research tells us that to become more skilled and confident readers over time, children need lots of opportunities to:

- build **spoken language** by talking and listening
- learn about print and books
- learn about the sounds of spoken language (this is called **phonological awareness**)
- learn about the letters of the alphabet
- be read to and read on their own
- learn and use letter-sound relationships (this is called **phonics**) and be able to recognize words when they see them
- spell and write
- develop their ability to read quickly and naturally (this is called **fluency**)
- learn new words and build their knowledge of what words mean (this is called **vocabulary**)
- build their knowledge of the world
- build their ability to understand what they read (this is called **comprehension**)

Talking and listening

Remember the old saying "children should be seen and not heard"? Research tells us that for children to become readers, they should listen and talk a lot.

By the time children are one year old, they already know a lot about **spoken language**—talking and listening. They recognize some speech sounds. They know which sounds make the words that are important to them. They begin to imitate those sounds. Children learn all of this by listening to family members

The main source of information in this booklet is the report of the National Reading Panel, *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction.* This report, along with the other reports and books listed at the back of this booklet, offer more research-based information about how children learn to read and write.

talk. Even "baby talk," which exaggerates the sounds and rhythms of words, makes a contribution to children's ability to understand language. Children who do not hear a lot of talk and who are not encouraged to talk themselves often have problems learning to read.

Print and books

Even though books don't come with operating instructions, we use them in certain ways. We hold them right side-up. We turn the pages one at a time. We read lines of words starting at the left and moving to the right. Knowing about print and books and how they are used is called **print awareness.**

Print awareness is an important part of knowing how to read and write. Children who know about print understand that the words they see in print and the words they speak and hear are related. They will use and see print a lot, even when they're young—on signs and billboards, in alphabet books and storybooks, and in labels, magazines, and newspapers. They see family members use print, and they learn that print is all around them and that it is used for different purposes.

Sounds in spoken language

Some words rhyme. Sentences are made up of separate words. Words have parts called **syllables**. The words *bag, ball,* and *bug* all begin with the same sound. When a child begins to notice and understand these things, he is developing **phonological awareness**—the ability to hear and work with the sounds of spoken language.

When a child also begins to understand that spoken words are made up of separate, small sounds, he is developing **phonemic awareness**. These individual sounds in spoken language are called **phonemes**. For example, the word *big* has three phonemes, /b/, /i/, and /g/.*

Children who have phonemic awareness can take spoken words apart sound by sound (the name for this is **segmentation**) and put together sounds to make words (the name for this is **blending**). Research shows that how easily children learn to read can depend on how much phonological and phonemic awareness they have.

The ABCs

Singing the alphabet song is more than just a fun activity. Children who go to kindergarten already knowing the shapes and names of the letters of the alphabet, and how to write them, have a much easier time learning to read. Knowing the names and shapes of letters is sometimes called **alphabetic knowledge**.

Reading aloud

Reading aloud to children has been called the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for success in reading. Reading aloud, with children participating actively, helps children learn new words, learn more about the world, learn about written language, and see the connection between words that are spoken and words that are written.

* *A letter between slash marks, /b/, shows the phoneme, or sound, that the letter represents, and not the name of the letter. For example, the letter b represents the sound /b/.*

Phonics and word-study skills

Phonics instruction helps beginning readers see the relationships between the sounds of spoken language and the letters of written language. Understanding these relationships gives children a tool that they can use to recognize familiar words quickly and to figure out words they haven't seen before.

Word-study instruction is the step that follows phonics instruction. It helps older children learn to apply their phonics knowledge and knowledge of word parts (such as **prefixes**, **suffixes**, and **root words**) as they read and write words. Rapid **word recognition** means that children spend less time struggling over words and have more time getting meaning from what they read, which, of course, is the real purpose for reading.

Spelling and writing

Children learn more about how print works when they spell and write on their own. When they begin to write, children draw and scribble. Later, they use what they are learning about sounds and letters when they try to write words. This often is called **invented**, or **developmental**, **spelling**. Because invented spelling encourages children to think about the sounds in words and how the sounds are related to letters, it can help preschool and kindergarten children develop both as readers and writers. However, after kindergarten, children need well-organized, systematic lessons in spelling to help them become good spellers.

Fluency

Fluency is the word for being able to read quickly and accurately. Fluent readers recognize words automatically. They are able to group words quickly to help them get the meaning of what they read. When fluent readers read aloud, they read smoothly and with expression. Their reading sounds natural, like speech. Readers who have not yet developed fluency read slowly, word by word. Sometimes, their oral reading is choppy and plodding. They may make a lot of mistakes.

Most beginning readers do not read fluently. However, by the end of first grade, children should be reading their grade level books fluently.

Vocabulary and knowledge of the world

Vocabulary is the name for words we must know in order to listen, speak, read, and write effectively. Time and again researchers have found strong connections between the size of children's vocabularies, how well they comprehend what they read, and how well they do in school.

Children who are poor readers often do not have the vocabulary knowledge they need to get meaning from what they read. Because reading is difficult for them, they cannot and do not read very much. As a result, they may not see new words in print often enough to learn them. Good readers read more, become better readers, and learn more words; poor readers read less, become poorer readers, and learn fewer words.

Children learn vocabulary in two ways: *indirectly*, by hearing and seeing words as they listen, talk, and read; and *directly* by parents and teachers teaching them the meanings of certain words.

Vocabulary and knowledge of the world are, of course, very closely tied together. Children who know something about the world are much better able to understand what they read about in school.

Comprehension

Comprehension means getting meaning from what we read. It is the heart of reading. Research shows that knowledge of letter-sound relationships and comprehension go hand-in-hand. If children can sound out the words, but don't understand what they are reading, they're not really reading.

Children can build their comprehension by learning to use mental plans, or strategies, to get meaning as they read. These strategies include using what they already know to make sense of what they read, making predictions, paying attention to the way a reading selection is organized, creating mental pictures, asking questions, and summarizing.

Kindergarten

What to do at home

Talk often with your child to build listening and talking skills

1 **Talk with your child often...as you eat together, shop for groceries, walk to school, wait for a bus.** As she gets ready for school, ask about the stories and poems she is reading and what projects she has in science or art time. Ask about friends and classmates (encourage her to use their names) and to describe the games they like to play together. Ask questions that will encourage her to talk, and not just give "yes" or "no" answers.

2 **Have your child use his imagination to make up and tell you stories.** Ask questions that will encourage him to expand the stories.

> PARENT TALK
> "Why didn't the dog just run away?"
> "Where did the boy live?"
> "What kind of eyes did the monster have?"

3 **Have a conversation about recent family photographs.** Ask your child to describe each picture: who is in it, what's happening, and where the picture was taken.

4 **Listen to your child's questions patiently and answer them just as patiently.** If you don't know the answer to a question, work together to find one (look things up in a book or on the computer, for example).

5 **Talk about books that you've read together.** Ask your child about favorite parts and characters and answer his questions about events or characters.

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6 **Pay attention to how much TV your child is watching.** Set aside "no TV" time each day and use that time to talk together.

7 **Tell stories about your childhood.** Make a story out of something that happened, such as a special birthday or a visit to a zoo or city.

Show your child how books and print work

1 **As you read with your child, have him point out such things as front and back covers and the title.** Have him point out the names of authors and illustrators and tell what those people do. Have him show you where you should start reading on a page.

2 **Help your child make connections between print and pictures as you read.** Have him find details in the pictures, then help him find and point to the words that name those details.

Focus your child's attention on the sounds of spoken language

1 **Sing or say nursery rhymes and songs.**

2 **Play word games.**

> PARENT TALK
> "How many words can you say that rhyme with *fox*? With *bill*?"

3 **Read a story or poem and ask your child to listen for words that begin with the same sound.** Have her say the words. Then have her say another word that begins with that sound.

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4 **As you read, stop and say a simple word.** Have your child say the sounds in the word, write the letters for the sounds, and then read what he wrote.

> PARENT TALK
> "'**The dog is big.**' Big. Can you say the sounds in *big*? Now can you write the letters for the sounds? Good. Now read the word to me."

Have your child identify and name the letters of the alphabet

1 **Point out letters and have your child name them.**

2 **Make an alphabet book with your child.** Have him draw pictures or cut pictures from magazines or use old photos. Paste each picture into the book. With your child, write the first letter of the word that stands for the object or person in the picture (for example, B for *bird*, M for *milk*, and so on).

Support what your child is learning in school about the relationship between letters and sounds

1 **Point out labels, boxes, newspapers, magazines, and signs that display words with letter-sound relationships that your child is learning in kindergarten.**

2 **Listen to your child read words and books from school.** Be patient and listen as your child practices. Let your child know you are proud of what he is learning.

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Encourage your child to spell and write

1. **When your child is writing, encourage him to spell words by using what he knows about sounds and letters.**

2. **Encourage your child to write notes, e-mails, and letters to family members and friends.** You may have your child tell you the message for you to write and include with her original work.

3. **Have your child create his own picture book made with his own drawings or with pictures that he cuts from magazines.** Help him to label the pictures. Include pictures that illustrate the new words he is learning.

Help your child build vocabulary, knowledge of the world, and comprehension

1 **As you read aloud, pause from time to time to ask him about the meaning of the book.** Help him make connections between his life and what's happening in the book. Explain new ideas and words to him. Encourage your child to ask questions about the book. Ask him to retell the story, or to tell in his own words what the book was about.

> **PARENT TALK**
> "What was your favorite part of the story? Why did you like it?"
> "What new things did you learn from this book?"
> "Why do you think Sam got lost? Sam said he wanted to explore the forest. *Explore* means he wanted to find out what was in the forest."

2 **Use and repeat important words such as names of buildings, parks, zoos, cities, and other places that you visit.**

3 **Help your child develop an interest in the world.** Read to him from your magazines and newspapers, as well as from informational (nonfiction) children's books. Help him to explore ideas and interests by using appropriate web sites.

What to look for in kindergarten classrooms

In effective kindergarten classrooms, you will see literacy instruction that focuses on...

Developing talking and listening abilities

The teacher...

shows children appropriate ways to talk and listen, ask and answer questions, and give and follow directions.

The children...

talk with teachers and classmates about what they have read and heard. They retell stories that they have heard read aloud. They make up and tell their own stories. They may pretend to be characters in play centers.

> "Let's play restaurant!""I like this book. It's about snakes!""I'll be the princess, and you be the prince."

Teaching about books and print

The teacher...

shows children how books should be handled, how they are read from front to back, from the top to the bottom of a page, and from left to right on a page. He talks about the various kinds of print in the classroom, including their meaning and purpose.

The children...

enjoy books and reading. They see lots of print around them being used in many ways. They are curious about the print and eager to learn what it means.

> "What does this word say?"
>
> "You're supposed to write your name on your folder."
>
> "See that list over there? I know those color names!"

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Teaching about the alphabet

The teacher...

helps children learn the names and shapes of all the letters of the alphabet and encourages the children to play with letters and to write using letters.

The children...

listen to the teacher read them an alphabet book, then sing the alphabet song. Some children play with plastic letters, while others say the letters as they write their own names.

> "That's M!—M is the first letter in my name."
>
> "I'm going to find all the e's on this page."
>
> "This is my favorite ABC book."

Teaching the sounds of spoken language

The teacher...

provides explicit instruction in **phonological awareness** and **phonemic awareness**. The teacher has children put together sounds (**blending**) to make words and break words into separate sounds (**segmentation**). As the children write, he promotes phonemic awareness by encouraging them to use what they know about the sounds that make up words.

The children...

have fun with the sounds of words. Early in the year, they tell which words in a story rhyme; they may make up their own nonsense rhymes. A little later in the year, they listen for the beginning sounds of the words in a poem. They also may clap out the number of syllables in their names and in words. Late in the year, they put together and take apart the separate sounds in words. They begin to relate sounds to letters and to write the letters for the sounds that they hear.

Phonemic awareness: What blending and segmentation look like

Phoneme blending: teachers say a word phoneme by phoneme, then have the children repeat the sequence of phonemes and combine the phonemes to say the word.

Teacher: /s/ /u/ /n/

Children: /s/ /u/ /n/; *sun.*

Phoneme segmentation: teachers say a word, then have the children break it into its separate phonemes, saying each one as they tap out or count it.

Teacher: *slim*

Children: /s/ /l/ /i/ /m/.

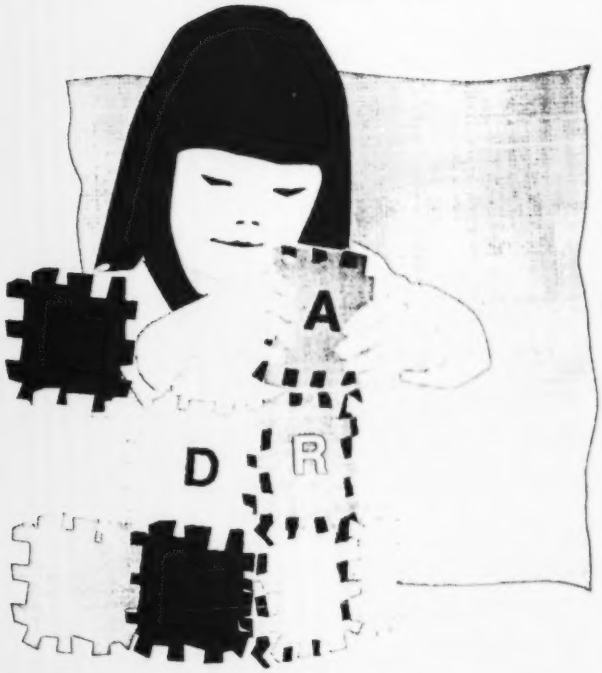
Teacher: How many sounds are in *slim*?

Children: Four sounds.

Teaching phonics

The teacher...

uses **explicit instruction** to teach children a set of the most useful letter-sound relationships.



The children...

read easy books that contain words with the letter-sound relationships they are learning. They are also writing the relationships they know in words, sentences, messages, and their own stories.

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Developing spelling and writing

The teacher...

has children practice their new writing skills in groups with other children and at learning centers. She makes spelling development a part of writing activities.

The children...

depending on the time of the year, scribble, draw, label pictures, and use their growing knowledge of sounds and letters to write messages. They are becoming aware of correct spellings for some words, especially their names.

Building vocabulary and knowledge of the world

The teacher...

talks with the children about important new words and ideas as she reads aloud. She helps them connect the new words to their own knowledge and experiences. She discusses words that are most important for understanding the reading selection. She emphasizes words that the children are likely to see and use often and teaches children the meaning of new words over an extended period of time. She thinks about the content of the books that she reads to the children and chooses books that build on and expand children's knowledge.

The children...

learn lots of new words and like to share their new words with their families. They see the teacher's enthusiasm for words and enjoy playing with words and language. They use words that are important to their schoolwork, such as the names for colors, shapes, and numbers. They explore new ideas and learn new words.

"This is the picture I drew today. It's an octopus. I'll show you—it has eight legs!"

"We learned about circles today. This plate is a circle."

Building comprehension

The teacher...

reads aloud to children often and discusses books before, during, and after reading. She reads many different kinds of books, including "make-believe" (fiction), "real" (nonfiction), and poetry. She shows children how good readers get meaning from what they read.

The children...

listen to and understand what is read to them. They answer the teacher's questions. They make connections between what they already know and what they are reading about. They talk about what they learned from non-fiction books they have read, and they retell or act out important events in stories. They identify the characters, settings, and events in stories.

"I learned that you can't see across the ocean!"

"I have a cat that looks just like the cat in that story!"

"I want to be the Little Red Hen!"

What children should be able to do by the end of kindergarten

The following is a list of some accomplishments that you can expect of your child by the end of kindergarten. This list is based on research in the fields of reading, early childhood education, and child development. Remember, though, that children don't develop and learn at the same pace and in the same way. Your child may be more advanced or need more help than others in her age group. You are, of course, the best judge of your child's abilities and needs. You should take the accomplishments as guidelines and not as hard-and-fast rules. If you have concerns about your child's reading development, talk to his teacher.

Books and print

By the end of kindergarten, a child . . .

- Knows the parts of a book and how books are held and read
- Identifies a book's title and understands what authors and illustrators do
- Follows print from left to right and from top to bottom of a page when stories are read aloud
- Understands the relationship between print and pictures
- Understands that the message of most books is in the print and not the pictures

The alphabet

By the end of kindergarten, a child . . .

- Recognizes the shapes and names of all the letters in the alphabet (both uppercase and lowercase letters)
- Writes many uppercase and lowercase letters on his own

Sounds in spoken language

By the end of kindergarten, a child . . .

- Understands that spoken words are made up of separate sounds
- Recognizes and makes rhymes
- Identifies words that have the same beginning sound
- Puts together, or blends, spoken sounds into simple words

Phonics and word recognition

By the end of kindergarten, a child . . .

- Knows a number of letter-sound relationships
- Understands that the order of letters in a written word represents the order of sounds in a spoken word
- Recognizes some common words on sight, such as *a, the, I, said, you, is, are*

Reading

By the end of kindergarten, a child . . .

- Listens carefully to books read aloud
- Asks and answers questions about stories
- Uses what he already knows to help him understand a story
- Predicts what will happen in a story based on pictures or information in the story
- Retells and/or acts out stories
- Knows the difference between "made-up" (fiction) and "real" (nonfiction) books and the difference between stories and poems

Spelling and writing

By the end of kindergarten, a child . . .

- Uses phonemic awareness and letter knowledge to spell and write words
- Begins to spell some words correctly
- Writes his own first and last name and the first names of some friends, classmates, or family members
- Writes some letters and words as they are said to her

Vocabulary and knowledge of the world

By the end of kindergarten, a child . . .

- Plays with and is curious about words and language
- Uses new words in her own speech
- Knows and uses words that are important to school work, such as the names for colors, shapes, and numbers
- Knows and uses words that are important to daily life, such as street names and addresses and names for community workers

The main source for this list of accomplishments is* Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.** ***For more information about this book, see Suggested Reading in the back of this booklet.

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First Grade

What to do at home

The top three

- Talk often with your child to build listening and talking skills.
- Read to and with your child—often. Talk to him about the words and ideas in books.
- Ask your child's teacher how you can help your child practice at home what he is learning at school.

Support what your child is learning in school about relationships between letters and sounds

1 **Listen to your child read books from school.** Be patient as your child practices. Let him know you are proud of his reading.

2 **Say the sounds of letters and ask your child to write the letter or letters that represent the sound.**

If your child needs help with developing phonemic awareness or identifying and naming letters of the alphabet, read the suggestions in the kindergarten section of this booklet. Remember that these two skills are very important in helping children learn to read and write.

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3 **Ask your child to point out the letter-sound relationships he is learning in all of the things you are reading together—books, calendars, labels, magazines, and newspapers.**

4 **Play word games.** On cards, write words that contain the letter-sound relationships he is learning at school. Take turns choosing a card and blending the sounds to make the word. Then use the word in a sentence.

Encourage your child to spell and write

1 **Say a word your child knows and have him repeat the word.** Then help him write the word the way he hears it.

2 **Write a word on paper and cut the letters apart (or use plastic or foam letters).** Mix the letters and have your child spell a word by putting the letters in order.

3 **As you are reading with your child, point out words that have similar spellings, such as *hop* and *pop*.** Ask him to write similar words, for example, *top*, *mop*, and *cop*.

4 **Encourage your child to write often—for example, letters and thank-you notes, simple stories, and grocery lists.**

Help your child build vocabulary, knowledge of the world, and comprehension

1 **When you read together, stop now and then to talk about the meaning of the book.** Help her make connections between what's happening in the book and her own life and experiences, or to other books you've read together. Ask her questions so that she talks about the information in a non-fiction book, or about the characters or events of a fiction book. Encourage your child to ask questions. Ask her to explain what the book was about, in her own words.

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Before you come to the end of a story, ask your child to predict what might happen next or how the story will end.

3

Talk about new words and ideas that your child has read or heard. Ask her to make up sentences with the new words or use the words in other situations. Help her to find out more about new ideas by using appropriate web sites.

4

Read magazines and newspapers together. Get him interested in what's happening in other parts of the world.

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What to look for in first grade classrooms

In effective first grade classrooms, you will see literacy instruction that focuses on...

Developing talking and listening abilities

The teacher...

helps children use language that is appropriate for different audiences and purposes.

The children...

use speaking and listening for many purposes, including getting and giving information, giving opinions, and talking with teachers and classmates. They talk about what has been read to them or what they have read. They retell stories that they have heard read aloud. They make up and tell stories based on their own experiences. They use the more formal language expected at school, such as complete sentences.

Teaching about books and print

The teacher...

reads aloud to the children often, sharing many different types of books and other print materials. She shows her enthusiasm for reading and her eagerness for the children to learn to read. As she reads, she shows the parts of print such as the beginnings and endings of sentences, new paragraphs, and different punctuation marks.

The children...

are excited about being read to and about learning to read. They recognize the titles of books and ask the teacher to read their favorites. They spend part of the day looking at books or **pretend reading** books of their choice.

Teaching about the alphabet

The teacher...

makes sure that children can recognize and name all of the letters of the alphabet, both uppercase and lowercase.

The children...

can quickly name the letters of the alphabet in order and recognize all letters. They use their knowledge of letters when they write.

Teaching phonemic awareness

The teacher...

provides explicit instruction in phonemic awareness. She shows the children how to do phonemic awareness activities and helps them with feedback. The activities are short and fun. (See the next page for examples of each activity.)

The children...

practice a lot with phonemes. For example, they clap out the sounds they hear in words (**segmentation**), put sounds together to make words (**blending**), add or drop sounds from words (**phoneme addition** and **deletion**), and replace sounds in words (**phoneme substitution**).

Phonemic awareness activities that you may see in first grade classrooms

Phoneme deletion: Children recognize the word that remains when you take away a phoneme.

Example

Teacher: What is *space* without the /s/?

Children: *Space* without the /s/ is *pace.*

Phoneme addition: Children make a new word by adding a phoneme to a word.

Example

Teacher: What word do you have if you add /p/ to the beginning of *lace*?

Children: *Place.*

Phoneme substitution: Children substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word.

Example

Teacher: The word is *rag.* Change /g/ to /n/. What's the new word?

Children: *Ran.*

Teaching phonics and word recognition

The teacher...

explicitly teaches the children letter-sound relationships in a clear and useful sequence. The teacher also teaches children "irregular" words they will see and read often, but that do not follow the letter-sound relationships they are learning. These are often called **sight words**—words such as *said, is, was, are.*

The children...

learn to blend sounds to read words—first one-syllable words and, later, words with more than one syllable. They read easy books that include the letter-sound relationships they are learning as well as sight words that they have been taught. They recognize and figure out the meaning of compound words (words made of two words put together, such as *background*). They practice writing the letter-sound relationships in words, sentences, messages, and their own stories.

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Phonics instruction

Although there are several different approaches to teaching phonics, here are some activities that you are likely to see in first grade classrooms.

- Children sort out objects and pictures by the beginning sounds they have studied such as: /b/, /c/, and /t/. They put the objects in baskets labeled with the beginning letter. "I have a *turtle*. It goes in the T basket." "This *cup* goes in the C basket."
- The teacher teaches the *–ing* spelling pattern and sounds, pointing out *–ing* words in books. The children look for examples of *–ing* words in books in the classroom library. "I found *singing*!" "This book has *wing*!" They copy the words on index cards and add them to the **word wall** under the heading "*–ing* words."
- The teacher helps children use plastic letters to spell out words containing sounds they have studied. She starts with two letter words and moves on to longer words. "Find two letters and make the word *in*. Now add one letter to make the word *pin*. Now add a letter to make the word *spin*. Using those same letters, change the word to *pins*."
- The teacher reads a poem written on chart paper to the class, pointing to each word as he reads. When he's done, he invites children to circle the words beginning with the /p/ sound, saying the word as they circle it.

Developing spelling and writing

The teacher...

provides opportunities for children to practice writing skills independently in both whole group and learning center settings. She makes spelling a part of writing activities. She helps children begin to think through their writing efforts—planning, writing drafts, and revising.

The children...

use writing more and more as a way to communicate ideas. They begin to organize their writing by planning, writing a draft copy, and editing it. They continue to use some invented spelling, but are learning the correct spellings of most of the words that they write.

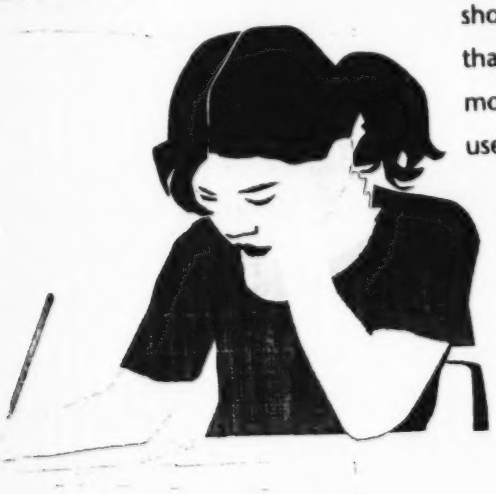
Building vocabulary and knowledge of the world

The teacher...

talks with the children about important new vocabulary words and helps them relate the new words to their own knowledge and experience. He makes a point of using new words in classroom discussions. He urges the children to use these words when they talk and write.

The children...

talk about the meanings of words and use new words when they talk and write. They begin to recognize words that are alike (synonyms) and words that are opposite (antonyms). They also begin to recognize the roles of different words in sentences—words that name (nouns) and words that show action (verbs). They understand that the language they use in school is more formal than the language they use at home and with friends.



Building comprehension

The teacher...

reads aloud to children often and discusses books with them before, during, and after reading. The teacher listens to children read aloud, corrects their errors, and asks them questions about what they are reading. He shows children how to use mental plans, or strategies, to get meaning from what they read.

The children...

read aloud with accuracy and show that they understand what they're reading. They read books (fiction, nonfiction, and poetry) that are appropriate for the time in the school year. They make connections between what they already know and what they are reading. They pay attention to their reading and recognize when something doesn't make sense. They summarize and discuss what they read with classmates and their teacher. They choose to read on their own and enjoy reading.

What children should be able to do by the end of first grade

The following is a list of some accomplishments you can expect of your child by the end of first grade. This list is based on research in the fields of reading, early childhood education, and child development. Remember, though, that children don't develop and learn at the same pace and in the same way. Your child may be more advanced or need more help than others in her age group. You are, of course, the best judge of your child's abilities and needs. You should take the accomplishments as guidelines and not as hard-and-fast rules. If you have concerns or questions about your child's reading development, talk to his teacher.

Books and print

By the end of first grade, a child . . .

- Knows the difference between letters and words
- Knows that there are spaces between words in print
- Knows that print represents spoken language and contains meaning
- Knows some of the parts of print, such as the beginnings and endings of sentences, where paragraphs begin and end, and different punctuation marks
- Begins to understand why people read—to learn and enjoy

The alphabet

By the end of first grade, a child . . .

- Can recognize and name all of the letters of the alphabet

Sounds in spoken language

By the end of first grade, a child . . .

- Can count the number of syllables in a word
- Can put together and break apart the sounds of most one-syllable words

Phonics and word recognition

By the end of first grade, a child . . .

- Can show how spoken words are represented by written letters that are arranged in a specific order
- Can read one-syllable words using what he knows about phonics
- Uses phonics to sound out words he doesn't know
- Can recognize some irregularly spelled words, such as *have, said, you,* and *are*

Reading

By the end of first grade, a child . . .

- Reads aloud first grade books and understands what they mean
- Can tell when he is having problems understanding what he is reading
- Reads and understands simple written instructions
- Predicts what will happen next in a story
- Discusses what she already knows about topics of books she is reading
- Can ask questions (how, why, what if?) about books she is reading
- Can describe, in his own words, what he has learned from a book he is reading
- Can give a reason for why he is reading a book (to be entertained, to follow directions, to learn about a non-fiction topic, for example)

Spelling and writing

By the end of first grade, a child . . .

- Uses **invented** (or **developmental**) **spelling** to try to spell words on his own
- Understands that there is a correct way to spell words
- Uses simple punctuation marks and capital letters
- Writes for different purposes—stories, explanations, letters, lists
- Writes things for others to read (by thinking of ideas, writing draft copies, and revising drafts)

Vocabulary

By the end of first grade, a child . . .

- Uses language with more control (such as speaking in complete sentences)
- Understands that the language used in school is more formal than the language used at home and with friends
- Talks about the meaning of words and uses new words when he speaks and writes
- Begins to see that some words mean the same thing (synonyms) and some words have opposite meanings (antonyms)
- Begins to recognize that words play different roles in sentences (for example, some words—nouns—name things and some words—verbs—show action)

The main source for the list of accomplishments is *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.* For more information about this book, see Suggested Reading in the back of this booklet.

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Second and third grades

What to do at home

The top three

- Talk often with your child to build listening and speaking skills.
- Read to and with your child often. Talk to her about the words and ideas in books. Encourage your child to read on her own.
- Ask your child's teacher how you can help your child practice at home what she is learning at school.

Use reading opportunities to help your child develop fluency

1. **Listen to your child read books that he has brought home from school.** Be patient as your child practices reading. Let him know that you are proud of his reading.

2. **If your child is not a very fluent reader (that is, she reads slowly and makes lots of mistakes), ask her to reread a paragraph or page a few times.**

Find opportunities for your child to spell and write

1. **Encourage your child to write often—for example, letters and thank-you notes to relatives and friends, simple stories, e-mails, and items for the grocery list.**

2. **Help your child learn the correct spellings of words.**

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Find opportunities to help your child develop vocabulary, knowledge of the world, and comprehension

1 **Talk about new words that your child has read or heard.** Ask her to make up sentences with the new words or use the words in other situations.

2 **Help your child use the dictionary or thesaurus to check on the meanings of new words she reads or hears.**

3 **Help your child become aware of prefixes, suffixes, and root words.** Point them out in books you are reading together or in print materials around the house. Ask her to think of other words related to the words you are discussing.

> **PARENT TALK**
> "Can you think of any other words that have the word *move* in them?" (Some possible answers are *moveable*, *movement*, *moving*, and *moved*.) "Here's the word *disappear*. What other words do you know that start with *dis-*?" (Some possible answers are *disappoint*, *disagree*, and *disbelieve*.)

4 **Show your child how to use context—the sentences, words, and pictures around an unfamiliar word—to figure out the word's meaning.**

> **PARENT TALK**
> Read a line from a book, such as this line from Eric Carle's *Pancakes, Pancakes!* "Take a sickle and cut as much wheat as the donkey can carry." Then ask a question, such as "Look at the picture of Jack cutting the wheat. What is he using? That's right, it's a sickle. A sickle is a tool for cutting wheat and other kinds of grain."

5 **As you read a book with your child, stop now and then to talk to her about the meaning of the book.** Help her relate the experiences or events in the book to experiences or events in her life or to other books you have read together. Ask her questions that encourage her to talk about the information in a nonfiction book, or about the characters or events of a fiction book. Encourage your child to ask questions. Ask her to tell in her own words what the book was about.

What to look for in second and third grade classrooms

In effective second and third grade classrooms, you will see literacy instruction that focuses on...

Promoting reading accuracy

The teacher...

helps children continue to use their knowledge of phonics to sound out and pronounce new words. The teacher helps children recognize simple, common spelling patterns in words. She also helps children learn the spellings and meanings of word parts such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words.

The children...

become more able to read words accurately by using their knowledge of phonics. They use the other words in a sentence (the context) to figure out the pronunciations and meanings of new words.

Building fluency

The teacher...

reads aloud to children, modeling fluent reading. She makes sure that children are working on developing fluency and monitors their progress. By listening to children read aloud, or by sometimes timing children's reading rates, the teacher ensures that children are becoming fluent readers.

The children...

are becoming more fluent readers by reading, reading, reading. They are improving their oral reading fluency by rereading selections aloud.

Fluency instruction

In second and third grade classrooms, effective instruction will include some of the following activities for building fluency.

- Teachers listen to individual children read aloud and provide assistance and encouragement as they repeatedly read until they are fluent.
- Teachers read aloud and children read along as a group. The children repeat the reading until they are fluent.
- In a listening center, children read along in their books as they listen to a fluent reader read a book on an audiotape. The children read with the tape until they can read the book without support.
- Pairs of children read paragraphs from a book to each other, taking turns and assisting each other until they can read the paragraphs fluently.
- Teachers time children as they read aloud paragraphs or pages of a selection. They also note children's reading errors.

Teaching spelling and writing

The teacher...

teaches some common spelling patterns. He encourages children to write in many different forms, such as letters, stories, poetry, reviews, directions, and reports. He helps children prepare for and plan their writing. He teaches them how to revise, edit, and refine what they have written and helps them write using a computer.

The children...

write often, and for different audiences and purposes. They correctly spell previously studied words. When they spell new words, they represent all of the sounds in the words. In their writing, the children use figurative language, dialogue, and vivid descriptions. They read their writing to others and discuss one another's writing, offering helpful suggestions.

Developing vocabulary and knowledge of the world

The teacher...

is excited about words and shows students that they have a personal interest in learning new and intriguing words. He tries to develop children's awareness of and interest in words, their meanings, and their power. As the teacher reads aloud to children, he discusses some of the important new words in the book. He relates new words to words the children already know and to their experiences. The teacher encourages children to read a lot, both in school and outside of school. He encourages them to explore topics that interest them and to use a variety of sources of information, including the Internet.

The children...

are interested in learning new words and are eager to share new vocabulary at school and at home. They are learning how to figure out the meanings of unknown words by using word parts such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words. They are able to use different parts of speech correctly, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. They read a lot on their own, and explore topics independently, often using computers.

Vocabulary instruction

In second and third grade classrooms, effective instruction will include both *specific* word instruction and instruction in *word learning strategies*.

Specific word instruction

- Teachers teach specific words from selections the students are about to read. These words are important for the students to know in order to understand what they will read.
- Teachers use the new words over an extended period of time.
- The children see, hear, and work with the words in many ways and in various contexts.

Word learning strategies

- Teachers show children how to use the dictionary and thesaurus to learn about the meanings of words. Teachers show how some words have more than one definition, and they teach children how to find the right definition for their particular situation.
- Teachers teach children how to use word parts (prefixes, suffixes, and root words) to determine the meaning of unknown words.
- Teachers provide instruction in how to use the meanings of known words in a reading selection (context) to figure out the meaning of unknown words.

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Increasing comprehension

The teacher...

guides children's understanding of what they are reading by discussing selections with them before, during, and after reading. The teacher shows children how to use simple strategies to get meaning from what they read.

The children...

read many different kinds of books, both with the teacher's guidance and on their own. They offer answers to "how," "why," and "what-if" questions, and read to find the answers to their own questions. They compare and contrast characters and events across stories. They explain and describe new information in their own words. They also interpret information from diagrams, charts, and graphs.

Reading comprehension instruction

Quality instruction includes teaching children strategies that they can use to get meaning from the materials they read. These comprehension strategies include being aware of how well they comprehend a selection, using **graphic organizers**, answering questions, asking questions, recognizing the way stories are organized, and summarizing.

To teach comprehension strategies, teachers first demonstrate the strategy, tell why it is important, and how, when, and where to use it. Then the children practice the strategy until they are able to use it on their own.
Here are some examples of strategy instruction:

- To help children understand and remember what they read, a teacher presents a diagram called a "story map" that shows the structure, or organization, of simple stories. (**See the story map example on the next page.**) She and the children talk about the story they have just read—its setting (where it takes place), the characters, the problems the characters face, the different events in the story, the resolutions of the characters' problems, and the theme or moral of the story. As they talk, the teacher fills in the story map. After several lessons with their teacher, the children are able to complete story maps on their own.
- To help children better understand and remember what they have read, a teacher teaches them how to ask themselves "main idea" questions about what they are reading. The class has just finished reading a selection about redwood trees in an informational book. The teacher gives the children several examples of main idea questions and contrasts them with detail questions. He points out that the main idea questions often start with "why" or "how." Then, under his guidance, the children practice asking main idea questions about several more selections in the book.

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Reading comprehension instruction—continued

- To help children understand, learn from, and remember the information in their social studies textbook, a teacher helps them learn how to write a summary. She demonstrates how to write a summary of one of the sections in the chapter they are reading. She shows them how to make use of the section headings and the topic sentences of each paragraph. She then shows the children how to eliminate details. Under her direction, the children work together to write summaries of several sections of a chapter in their social studies textbook. In subsequent lessons the children write summaries of the chapters in their science book. The teacher provides feedback so that children include the important parts of the chapters in their summaries.

A Story Map for "The Three Little Pigs"	
Setting	A make-believe time and place
Characters	Mother pig, three little pigs, big bad wolf
Problem or Goal	The three little pigs are ready to move out of their mother's house and live on their own.
Event 1	The first little pig builds a house of straw. The big bad wolf blows the house down.
Event 2	The second little pig builds a house of sticks. The big bad wolf blows the house down.
Event 3	The third little pig builds a house of bricks. The big bad wolf cannot blow the house down.
Event 4	The big bad wolf runs away or is killed (depending on version).
Solution	The three little pigs live happily ever after in the safe brick house.
Theme or Moral	Hard work pays off in the end.

In second and third grades, children improve their word-recognition and word-study skills and develop fluency—their ability to read quickly and accurately. These years also are the time to extend comprehension and vocabulary knowledge and to refine writing and spelling skills.

It is critical that children are up to "reading speed" by the end of third grade. Children who fail to make good progress in reading by the time they enter fourth grade are likely to have trouble in the upper grades and to drop out of school before graduating.

The following are lists of some accomplishments that you can expect of your child by the end of second and third grades. These lists are based on research in the fields of reading, early childhood education, and child development. Remember, though, that children don't develop and learn at the same pace and in the same way. Your child may be more advanced or need more help than others in her age group. You are, of course, the best judge of your child's abilities and needs. You should take the accomplishments as guidelines and not as hard-and-fast rules. If you have concerns or questions about your child's reading development, talk to his teacher.

What children should be able to do by the end of the second grade

Phonics and word recognition

By the end of second grade, a child...

- Can read a large number of regularly spelled one- and two-syllable words
- Figures out how to read a large number of words with more than two syllables
- Uses knowledge of phonics to sound out unfamiliar words
- Accurately reads many sight words

Reading

By the end of second grade, a child ...

- Reads and understands a variety of second grade level fiction and nonfiction books
- Knows how to read for specific purposes and to seek answers to specific questions
- Answers "how," "why," and "what-if" questions
- Interprets information from diagrams, charts, and graphs
- Recalls information, main ideas, and details after reading
- Compares and connects information read in different books and articles
- Takes part in creative responses to stories, such as dramatizations of stories and oral presentations

Spelling and writing

By the end of second grade, a child ...

- Pays attention to how words are spelled
- Correctly spells words he has studied
- Spells a word the way it sounds if she doesn't know how to spell it
- Writes for many different purposes
- Writes different types of compositions (for example, stories, reports, and letters)

- Makes good judgments about what to include in her writing
- Takes part in writing conferences and then revises and edits what he has written
- Pays attention to the mechanics of writing (for example, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation) in the final versions of compositions

Vocabulary

By the end of second grade, a child ...

- Wants to learn new words and share those words at school and home
- Uses clues from the context to figure out what words mean
- Uses knowledge of word parts such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words to figure out word meanings
- Increases vocabulary through the use of synonyms and antonyms
- Can use different parts of speech correctly, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs
- Learns more new words through independent reading
- Explores and investigates topics of interest on her own

What children should be able to do by the end of the third grade

Phonics and word recognition

By the end of third grade, a child...

- Uses phonics knowledge and word parts (prefixes, roots, suffixes) to figure out how to pronounce words she doesn't recognize

Reading

By the end of third grade, a child . . .

- Reads with fluency
- Reads a variety of third grade level texts (for example, story books, informational books, magazine articles, computer screens) with fluency and comprehension
- Reads longer stories and chapter books independently
- Summarizes major points from both fiction and non-fiction books
- Identifies and then discusses specific words or phrases that interfere with comprehension
- Discusses the themes or messages of stories
- Asks "how," "why," and "what-if" questions
- Distinguishes cause from effect, fact from opinion, and main ideas from supporting details
- Uses information gathered and his own reasoning to evaluate the explanations and opinions he reads about
- Understands and reads graphics and charts
- Uses context clues to get meaning from what she reads

Spelling and writing

By the end of third grade, a child...

- Correctly spells previously studied words
- Independently reviews her own written work for errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation

- Begins to use literary words and sentences in his writing, such as figurative language
- Combines information in compositions from a variety of sources, including books, articles, and computer information
- With assistance from teachers and classmates, edits and revises her compositions to make them easier to read and understand
- Discusses her own writing with other children and responds helpfully to the writing of other children

Vocabulary

By the end of third grade, a child...

- Wants to learn and share new words at school and at home
- Uses clues from context to figure out word meanings
- Uses her knowledge of word parts such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words to figure out word meanings
- Increases his vocabulary through the use of synonyms and antonyms
- Is able to use different parts of speech correctly, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs
- Develops her vocabulary and knowledge through independent reading
- Explores and investigates topics of interest on his own
- Uses a variety of sources to find information, including computers

The main source for this list of accomplishments is *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children.* For more information about this book, see Suggested Reading in the back of this booklet.

Some helpful terms to know

Teachers and day care providers might use these terms when talking to you about how your child is learning to read. Some of them are used in this booklet.

alphabetic knowledge Knowing the names and shapes of the letters of the alphabet.

alphabetic principle The understanding that written letters represent sounds. For example, the word *big* has three sounds and three letters.

big books Oversized books that allow for the sharing of print and illustrations with a group of children.

blending Putting together individual sounds to make spoken words.

comprehension The ability to understand and gain meaning from what has been read.

decodable books Books that are made up of words that contain only the letter-sound relationships that the children are learning, along with a few words that are taught as sight words.

decode The ability to recognize and read words by translating the letters into speech sounds to determine the word's pronunciation and meaning.

developmental spelling The use of letter-sound relationship information to attempt to write words.

emergent literacy The view that literacy learning begins at birth and is encouraged through participation with adults in meaningful reading and writing activities.

environmental print Print that is a part of everyday life, such as signs, billboards, labels, and business logos.

experimental writing Efforts by young children to experiment with writing by creating pretend and real letters and by organizing scribbles and marks on paper.

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explicit instruction Direct, structured, systematic teaching of a task.

fluency The ability to read text accurately and quickly and with expression and comprehension.

graphic organizers Diagrams that visually represent the organization and relationships of ideas in a text.

invented spelling See developmental spelling.

irregular words Frequently used words that don't follow the letter-sound relationship rules that children are learning.

leveled books Books that have been assigned a particular level (usually a number or letter, such as Level 1 or Level B) intended to indicate how difficult the book is for children to read.

literacy Includes all the activities involved in speaking, listening, reading, writing, and appreciating both spoken and written language.

phonemes The smallest parts of spoken language that combine to form words. For example, the word *hit* is made up of three phonemes (/h/ /i/ /t/) and differs by one phoneme from the words *pit*, *hip*, and *hot*.

phonemic awareness The ability to hear and identify the individual sounds in spoken words.

phonics The relationship between the sounds of spoken words and the individual letters or groups of letters that represent those sounds in written words.

phonological awareness The understanding that spoken language is made up of individual and separate sounds. Phonological awareness activities can involve work with rhymes, words, sentences, syllables, and phonemes.

predictable books Books that have repeated words or sentences, rhymes, or other patterns.

prefix A word part such as re-, un-, or pre- that is added to the beginning of a root word to form a new word with a new meaning.

pretend reading Children's attempts to "read" a book before they have learned to read. Usually children pretend read a familiar book that they have practically memorized.

print awareness Knowing about print and books and how they are used.

root word A word or word part to which a prefix or suffix is added.

segmentation Taking spoken words apart sound by sound.

sight words Words that a reader recognizes without having to sound them out. Some sight words are "irregular," or have letter-sound relationships that are uncommon. Some examples of sight words are *you, are, have,* and *said.*

suffix A word part such as –ness, -able, or –er that is added to the end of a root word to form a new word with a new meaning.

syllable A word part that contains a vowel or, in spoken language, a vowel sound (*e-vent, news-pa-per, pret-ty*).

vocabulary The words we must know in order to communicate effectively. *Oral* vocabulary refers to words that we use in speaking or recognize in listening. *Reading* vocabulary refers to words we recognize or use in print.

word walls Word-study and vocabulary words that are posted on the classroom wall so all children can easily see them. Usually, word walls are arranged alphabetically, with words starting with a certain letter listed under that letter for easy location.

word recognition The ability to identify printed words and to translate them into their corresponding sounds quickly and accurately so as to figure out their meanings.

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Suggested reading for parents and caregivers

Here are some books that can provide you with more information about early reading and writing.

Apel, K., & Masterson, J. (2001). *Beyond Baby Talk: From Sounds to Sentences, a Parent's Guide to Language Development.* Roseville, CA: Prima Publishing.

Armbruster, B. B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. (2001). *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read: Kindergarten Through Grade 3.* Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy (available online at www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading)

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Resources for parents and caregivers

The following government groups can provide you with useful information about learning to read.

The Partnership for Reading
www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading

Even Start Family Literacy Program
www.ed.gov/offices/OESE /CEP

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
www.ericeece.org

National Parent Information Network (NPIN)
www.npin.org

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication
www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec

National Institute for Literacy (NIFL)
www.nifl.gov

No Child Left Behind for Parents
www.nochildleftbehind.gov/parents/index.html

Partnership for Family Involvement in Education
www.pfie.ed.gov/

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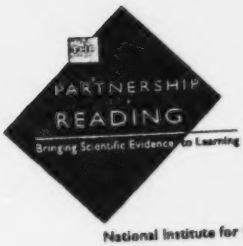
If you have young children between the ages of birth and age 4, look for the booklet

A Child Becomes a Reader: Birth through Preschool.

www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading

To order copies of this booklet, contact the National Institute for Literacy at EdPubs, PO Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398. Call 800-228-8813 or email edpubs@inet.ed.gov. This booklet can also be downloaded at The Partnership for Reading web site, www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading.



National Institute for Literacy

National Institute of Child Health
and Human Development

U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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